

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: April 1, 2003 **Project Number:** 9124.04

Location: Windham Town Hall
Windham, NH

Re: **Third (2nd Round) Public Meeting for the
Salem to Concord Bikeway Feasibility Study**

Meeting Summary

Wayne Morris from the Windham Town Planning Board welcomed all the participants to the Town of Windham.

Ram Maddali of the NHDOT outlined tonight's program including Public Input, Evaluation of options, Suggested route, Future Steps, and Panel Session to address ideas and concerns of those in attendance.

Reviewed Project Purpose and Identified Corridor for those in attendance for the first time.

Reviewed Study Process, introduced Rizzo Associates the consultant retained by the DOT to conduct this study and the Citizens Advisory Committee formed to assist with process.

Ram thanked those that had participated in the 1st Public Information Meetings and who had submitted comment sheets. As with the 1st meetings the Department requested that attendees pick up and fill out one of the comment sheets that have been provided.

Tom Jameson the Bicycle Pedestrian Transportation Coordinator for the NHDOT reviewed the information received from the comment/public input forms, emails, and telephone calls. Issues of concern included:

- Connectivity (to Park-n-Rides, to schools, to town centers, access to community facilities)
- Rail Service Restoration, future impacts
- Trail Surface, Asphalt Pavement versus compacted gravels
- Maintenance Issues (Who will be responsible for maintenance, Towns, State, Independent user groups)
- Road Crossings, Mid-block crossings have different challenges, Main Intersection's cost issue
- Present and future ATV (motorcycle) use

Right of way, the North end of rail corridor(s) not owned by State.

Domenic Ciavaro of Rizzo Associates was introduced and discussed the 3 basic options explored in this study. The Bikeway within the I-93 Right-Of-Way, the utilization of the existing highway network with appropriate improvements to enhance bike and pedestrian safety, and the development of the abandoned alignments of the Manchester & Lawrence Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad and the Concord and Portsmouth Railroad.

It is suggested that a combination of these options would make up the most technically feasible route. Refer to map and power point slide outlining advantages and disadvantages. In addition it was noted that 20 to 21 Acres would have to be acquired to utilize the long abandoned Concord and Portsmouth Rail bed.

The evaluation summary was presented. Construction cost for on-road improvements is for approximately 13 miles of roads that need improvements such as shoulders and sidewalks.

Paul Smith of Alta Planning and Design was introduced and did a presentation of the recommended route. Route features Manchester and Lawrence Rail Bed (exception at Manchester Airport) into the City of Manchester. On road alignment through Manchester is projected on Depot Street, Canal Street and River Road. The route would continue on the proposed Heritage Trail through Hooksett. (They are) Following the Derry model for developing trail system, (Derry Pathways).

Harvey Road is an additional on road segment of the suggested route to get around runway extension in Manchester. The City of Manchester and the Queen City Trail Alliance initiative for the corridor from Perimeter Road to Granite Street is well under way and they have already received a grant for developing a trail on a segment of that part of the Manchester and Lawrence Branch.

Suggested that property issue on north end may in part be addressed by the possibility of obtaining an easement from Public Service of New Hampshire.

There are prefab bridges proposed at crossings of the Suncook and Soucook Rivers and the Allenstown Industrial Canal (estimated cost @ \$100,000.00). The concept is to bring a regional facility (Salem to Concord Bikeped Way) into and tie in with the City of Concord trail system. The entry into Concord has three options. Utilize Bow Lane from the railroad corridor to US 3, (Rte. 3 has shoulders and sidewalk to the intersection with NH 106, but high traffic volume). Another option to consider is utilizing Garvin Falls Road in Concord to connect with Manchester Street (US Rte. 3). The third option would be to install a 470-foot bike pedestrian bridge over the Merrimack River on the old abutments and piers of the railroad bridge that had been at this location. This would connect the trail to Hall Street and ready access to Down Town Concord. Estimated \$900,000.00 price tag for Merrimack River Crossing at this location.

Trail – Highway crossing issues will be addressed as follows. Local, two lane, low volume roads will be treated as a mid-block pedestrian crossing (crosswalk) with pavement markings in the road a warning signs on both approaches. Busy high volume highways will have the trail crossing incorporated into existing adjacent highway intersections with added pedestrian activated component in the signal system. Queen

City Avenue is a difficult crossing. Anticipate a pedestrian activated signal at this location. This will be dependent on agency or municipal review.

Ansel Sanborn, Administrator Bureau of Transportation Planning, NHDOT was introduced to discuss Future Steps.

“The completion of this study gets us to a Starting Point.”

Criteria for undertaking a project: Technical Feasibility, Environmentally Sound, Affordable, and Public Acceptance.

Technical Feasibility includes other users and modes that would utilize transportation facilities. Before I-93 project will go to the next phase all overall corridor issues will be considered. For example the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the State of New Hampshire will be entering into an agreement with a consultant to study the Transit, mass transit concept(s) for the Boston – Manchester, NH corridor.

Allocation of I-93 funds for Rail Trail is debatable. Many voices can be anticipated to weigh in on the issue not the least is the one to reduce (limit) the overall cost. No matter how incremental monies for a bike way would be in the overall project cost there will be those that will argue against the allocation (even if bikeway is within I-93 alignment). Major portion of State Highway funds are routed through the 10-year plan process. This means availability of funds is relatively far off into the future. The TE/CMAQ funds are more timely for an approved project.

Another issue at this time is the language of the pending Federal Transportation Act and what changes if any will affect funding procedures.

Public Acceptance will include not just those from the bicycle pedestrian community, but people looking at the corridor from another perspective.

The consultant will take the comments from tonight’s and Thursday’s (4/3/03) meetings and incorporate them into the draft study and present it to the Citizens Advisory Committee on April 15, 2003. On May 1, 2003 the completed study will be delivered to Commissioner Murray. Commissioner Murray has stated that she will send a copy to each community in the corridor for their consideration.

This document could improve the project competitiveness in the face of other projects.

Question/Answer Session

John St. Hillare, CAC Manchester Representative and member of the Queen City Trail Alliance (CMAQ cosponsor with the City of Manchester) Stated that he is in favor of adopting the Rail to Trail concept for a proposed Salem to Concord Bikeped facility. It would involve the least encroachment on properties in the corridor.

He is putting together a “Corridor Committee” to continue working on developing the Salem to Concord Bike Ped facilities after completion of the Study. The result will be stronger advocacy for this facility with the member communities working together. Contact him to sign on. (Had sign up sheet).

Tom Case of Windham (?), what portion of the cost is the Town responsibility? Using the TE/CMAQ program the sponsor will be required to commit to a 20% match. Could be as a community participation program (soft match) such as donations of equipment and labor (sweat equity). According to CAC representative from Derry community valued the portion of their trail ways that had community involvement more than the section that the only contribution was monetary.

What if one community doesn't want to participate? Identify utility within the town. Why it would benefit the town. Even more powerful a project with community connectivity, the greater the length the greater partnership is better.

Harold Morrisette, Londonderry, New Hampshire ATV Club – What are NHDOT plans to replace trail access for ATVs. Bob Spoerl, Department of Resources and Economic Development (Bureau of Trails) responded that this issue will and is being considered.

Queen City Trail Alliance, Public Partnership, Voices of Choices – South End. They adopted the Rail corridor from Perimeter Road to Granite Street. Of 750 signatories only 2 expressed opposition to creation of a bike/ped facility on the abandoned rail bed. They worked with the Union Leader, Hippo Press and recommend getting local newspapers involved. Their CMAQ applications are a success. They are creating a linear park that will also serve as a buffer between commercial and residential areas.

Peter Griffin: New Hampshire Rail Revitalization – He is here to encourage the project. He cautioned that towns and individuals should consider evaluation of intermodal transportation system before undertaking of specific project. Evaluate all your transportation needs. Reference to other areas of State where towns and regions are studying the intermodal issues.

John St. Hilare - Approached City of Manchester to develop the rail corridor as a shared use facility. That the concept of light rail is ok. Many contacts including the airport stated the only feasible light rail application was from the City to the airport; overall viability for rail Manchester to Lawrence Mass is not there. A regional rail trail is the best use of the corridor. Trail does not prohibit return of rail.

Paul Smith, Existing right of way has encroachments, not dissections. In Derry road built on rail bed, houses have frontage on the old corridor and their driveways access the right of way.

Rail with trail is a legitimate concept. 61 rail with trails in the United States at this time. The Manchester and Lawrence in a Rail with Trail format will have significant environmental issues due to wetlands impacts resulting from offset requirements.

George Jones, Salem. So much energy was spent to get I-93 program going that intermodal fell by the wayside. However, NHDOT appears to be acknowledging that there is more to look at than pavement.

Salem section is close to NH 28 and with all the intersections and businesses the greater hazard is turning traffic. At the Rockingham Blvd intersection there is no time when there is no movement. Clough Road and Main Street are also heavily trafficked and will need a demand system to stop all traffic. 111 on the Windham/Salem line is another candidate for similar controls. (Kelly Road not as serious a traffic issue). Shopping and commercial businesses on the west side of Rte. 28/rail corridor will cause significant crossing issues for the trail.

Public concern about the change in the Neighborhood is pronounced. Creating a place to walk from NH 97 to Rockingham Blvd aroused a number of voices in opposition. Development of the Rail To Trail will be more controversial than we think (not a cake walk).

Paul Smith The study identifies the locations mentioned and recommends Pedestrian Activated Signalization and the reconfiguring of signal phasing.

Linda Harvey – Are there plans or a forecast for purchase of the remaining section of the Manchester and Lawrence still under Guilford Transportation ownership.

Christopher Morgan, Administrator Bureau of Rail and Transit, NHDOT responded that there is no timetable. NHDOT is in discussion with the Railroad and interest in purchase has been expressed. Funding issues have to be addressed. Commercial interests purchased easements from the railroad. This will create an issue for the proposed trail. In the case of the airport runway extension the airport had to purchase 6 miles of the line. The state agreed to buy each end for recreational uses and rail corridor preservation. He believes that the state will live up to this.

Sam Nassar, (owner of significant property(ies) adjacent to the rail corridor, stated that he is in favor of the creation of a Bike/Pedestrian trail) Inquired about the proposed NH Rte. 111 Bypass. If towns require emergency access structures will have to be built to standards to support emergency vehicles.

Bill Cass, Chief Project Manager, NHDOT Described aspects of proposed NH Rte. 111 bypass.

Wayne Morris, Windham – The development of the Salem to Concord Rail Trail will meet many of the goals of the New Hampshire Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the State's official five year plan for outdoor recreation. This plan offered a snapshot of household participation in outdoor recreation. It indicates that wildlife observation is an activity preferred by 85% of households. In addition 79% enjoy jogging, running walking, with 73% participate in day hiking and 55% bicycling. The development of the rail trail will furnish locations for communities within the corridor to have the facilities for these activities. Another section suggests that non-motorized activity should be a major focus in Outdoor recreation management. In the issues section entitled "Stewardship of the Natural Resource Base for outdoor Recreation" strategies call for comprehensive statewide and regional planning for open

space, recreation corridors and greenways and to target specific purchases in areas of the state where the fastest growth and usage is taking place. (Develop recreational opportunities in and near these communities.)

By law recreational facilities must have universal accessibility and the development of the rail trail would offer that opportunity to the physically challenged.

The SCORP document includes the impact of land use on recreational opportunities and the development of Smart Growth policies. One of the principles is to provide choices and safety in transportation to promote livable, walkable communities. The rail trail would increase accessibility for people of all ages within and between communities whether on foot or bicycle.

The SCORP document also identifies health and wellness benefits gained by improved recreational opportunities and bicycle-pedestrian linkages in communities. That NHDOT, local public works departments, and local boards work together to promote the development of bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and non-motorized transportation networks that in addition to meeting transportation goals helps to meet health goals. The development of the Rail Trail meets all these goals and objectives.

“We have a very unique opportunity to provide the most populous area of the state with a transportation and recreational corridor unmatched anywhere in New England; let's get it done.”

Tom Jameson advised the attendees that the SCORP document is online.

Windham resident inquired Will the bike path incorporated in the I-93 Environmental Impact Statement be included the end? Will the decision to develop the rail trail alternative result in dropping the Bike path from the I-93 alignment?

NHDOT – Cost estimated, the money is not allocated. Cost of bike path although only an incremental increase to the project cost is a cost that may be reviewed during efforts to mitigate the substantial overall cost. Also, consideration of the wetland impacts attributable to the bike path is to be expected.

Will the Manchester to Rockingham rail trail be incorporated in the Salem to Concord project? From Page Street heading east there is already a tube installed under I-93. Department of Resources and Economic Development (Bureau of Trails) envisions a large triangle formed by the Salem to Manchester corridor, the Manchester-Rockingham rail bed to Epping and another abandoned rail bed from Epping to Windham.

Cliff Sinnott, Executive Director, Rockingham Planning Commission – Timing of this study before consideration of Intermodal issues addressed; does this preclude the Transit Study?

NHDOT response the work with MASS and FHWA will start this year with a probable 2005 completion date. All the information from these meetings and planning efforts will be incorporated in this effort.

Christopher Morgan, NHDOT – Rail restoration efforts are extremely challenging. Not the least is funding. The Lowell to Nashua extension has approximately a \$60 million

price tag. Extensive studies are needed to justify funding and it is very competitive with every state competing for said funds. Studies must include long-term viability. In the case of the Lowell to Nashua project the MBTA has been favorable, but it will be at least 3 years before startup.

Abandoned rail corridors are even more challenging.

Rail trail although undertaken in a number of locations around the country is not favored by the Rail Industry.

Sandra Lagueux, Londonderry Trailways – Thanks to the NHDOT for conducting this project. It has empowered the community to begin the effort to make the bike/ped corridor a reality.

What is the amount estimated for the overall I-93 expansion?

William Cass, NHDOT - \$325 million construction costs.

\$420 million including ROW and mitigation

What about purchase of conservation land?

The \$420 million includes mitigation purchases.

Ms. Lagueux is in favor of the rail trail and the connectivity that it will provide.

Highways are no longer safe for cyclists. Look at the Minuteman Trail in Mass, we can do that here.

Peter Griffin, NH Rail Revitalization – Double standard for transportation modes. I-93 is supposedly for the greater good, but similar impacts caused by other modes receive harsher responses.

Intermodal consideration, nothing should be dismissed until the process is complete.

George Jones, Rail restoration would not be heavy rail. Light rail in the median of I-93 is a good idea. Keep pressure on NHDOT to maintain consideration of light rail in the I-93 corridor.

NHDOT has left room in the median for light rail. I-93 is considered a “Transportation Corridor”. Nothing is precluded; both Bikeped and light rail have been conceptualized in the early stages of the I-93 project development.

MASS is a big player on the overall I-93 concept.